

Childminders, home based day care and young children's transitions¹

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Given the frequency of transitions young children now make, the new political focus in Scotland on home-based day-care and the lack of evidence around transitions, the climate was right to scope a study of childminding and transitions. There is a pressing need to know more about the nature and types of provision childminders offer, the role they play in child and family life, their levels of expertise and how this is supported, and with this complex backdrop how they work with children in transition. So as to understand better the largely invisible and poorly understood role of childminders in transition for the children in their care, the focus of this chapter is therefore on the consultation process undertaken in a small scale scoping study with seventeen childminders on their approaches to supporting children in transition: the results will inform the design of a Scottish wide study which aims to understand whether a focus on transitions enhances the contribution of childminders to child and family well being, continuity of care over time, support for parents facing challenges in their lives, as well as for those who are working and in need of regular out-of-home care for their children. The first phase of this study was conducted between June and August 2015 with the support of the SCMA.

The context of the Scoping Study

The Scottish Government places great significance on the early years of life (Scottish Government, 2008). The present administration has put the closing of the poverty related attainment gap at the heart of their manifesto. Children aged 3-5 are currently offered 600 hours per annum of free early learning and childcare rising to 1140 free hours by 2020 (30 hours per week during the 'school year' or about 22 hours per week if spread over the full year). This huge expansion means a huge increase in staffing and space. In addition policy has determined that about 25% of two year olds would have improved life chances if this hours offer was available to them. Linked to this Scottish early learning and childcare challenge is the desire to ensure we get it right for all children: consequently there has been a programme of trials of different models for the expansion of early learning and childcare (Scottish Government, 2016a) including what are described as 'blended models' involving childminders. In the same year a 'Blueprint for Expansion' (Scottish Government, 2016b) is out for consultation. It focuses on quality, flexibility, accessibility and affordability and discusses an enhanced role for childminders.

Childminding in Scotland: the state of play

Family day-care: licensed home-based ECEC, is the most prevalent for children under

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the age of 3 (OECD, 2015). Childminders play a pivotal role in the lives of many families and the first transition into a new caring situation is just one that childminders will handle in their support of the children in their care. Scottish Childcare Statistics published in December 2013 stated that there were 6,185 childminding services registered in Scotland. Around 31,720 children (3.5% of population aged 0-15 years) of whom 23,000 were aged 0-6 years, attended a childminding service in November 2013. Typically, the children who benefit from their services have working parents who often choose this form of home-based care as the next-best choice to having their children at home. An arrangement is made between carer and family about the fees to be paid, the hours of attendance and the service to be offered by the carer. Families may decide to place their child with a childminder for all or part of the day or week. The Scottish National Care Standards (2005, currently being updated) says that for childminding there should be no more than six children under the age of 12 attending any service. Of those six children no more than three who have not yet started primary school and of those six children no more than one should be under the age of 12 months.

Sometimes the childminder's service combines with some hours or days spent regularly in the care of grandparents: this mix is often felt to be favourable for babies and younger children. As children become eligible for a free pre-school place (an entitlement in Scotland from the age of three until school start), children may spend part of the day with a childminder and part of the day in a preschool setting. Sometimes care is shared between childminder, grandparents and the pre-school. Such complexities of attendance pattern, a mix of different early learning and childcare arrangements and a need for flexibility, mean young children are making regular transitions in the course of a day or week.

Further, in Scotland two-year old children, whose parents are eligible economically or where the child is deemed to be otherwise vulnerable through, for example, family need, isolation, illness and associated lacks of alternative support, may be referred for placement with a community childminder rather than in any other form of out-of-home care, with the fees being met by the local government department concerned.

As at 31st March 2014 half of childminding services in Scotland had all grades of very good or excellent and two thirds of childminding and daycare services had a grade of very good or excellent for quality of care and support as. In comparison, 1% of childminding services and 0.5% of daycare services had a grade of weak or unsatisfactory for quality of care and support. More recent current figures suggest the number of active (rather than the registered) childminders is 5,570 (Scottish Government, 2016c): this at a time when recruitment into work in early childhood will be critical as Government seeks to expand children's entitled hours.

The SHANARRI Indicators

These initiatives raise the issue of what is quality for childminding providers – in Scotland the SHANARRI Indicators inform inspection quality through self-evaluation. The indicators (known by the acronym SHANARRI generated by the initial letters) focus on children, young people and families and the extent to which children are:

- **Safe:** Protected from abuse, neglect or harm
- **Healthy:** High standards of physical and mental health; support to make healthy, safe choices
- **Achieving:** Support and guidance in learning - boosting skills, confidence & self-esteem
- **Nurtured:** Having a nurturing and stimulating place to live and grow
- **Active:** Opportunities to take part in a wide range of activities
- **Respected:** Given a voice, and involved in the decisions that affect their well being
- **Responsible:** Taking an active role within their schools and communities
- **Included:** Getting help and guidance to overcome inequalities; full members of the communities in which they live and learn, and the extent to which families' wellbeing is strengthened and they experience increased resilience, greater confidence in parenting and earlier help and support.

These indicators form an important part of the childminding inspection process and are advocated for self-evaluation of a service (Marwick, Karagiannidou, Carey, Sadler & Dunlop, 2016). The use of these indicators is not exclusive to childminders and each indicator may not have a universal value as Ang et al's (2016) review points out:

“Rather than considering the effects of home-based childcare as universal, the influence of variables such as culture, social class, parental expectations, caregiver and child characteristics have to be taken into account when analysing relationships between quality of the environment and children's outcomes”. (page 5)

The part transitions play in the childminders' work

From the moment of registration to become a childminder in Scotland transitions are emphasised when prospective childminders are asked what they will do “to develop positive relationships with parents and carers which allow children to move easily and happily from one caring situation to another, particularly between the home and the childminder” (Care Inspectorate, 2012, page 7.) From the transition examples provided by SCMA, childminders need to take into account multiple transitions experienced by the children in their care in order to enrich transitions practices, understandings and outcomes.

In developing this proposal there is some evidence that childminders are working with

a very wide range of family issues, from children living in rural areas where there is little in the way of early childhood services, to those who played a supportive role to parents in establishing routines at home, to children who have low self-confidence, lack of trust and attachment difficulties (SCMA, 2015). The big questions that we wished to explore were: the unique role of the childminder in supporting children in transition; the support of parents in navigating their own transitions and the transitions their children are experiencing; the continuity childminders provide as children and families navigate change; the funds of knowledge of individual children held by the childminder that support children's transitions; childminder knowledge of transitions, and the ways in which childminders could share their approaches to transitions with other childminding practitioners to build capacity in the services provided.

The ways in which their childminders support these changes for both child and family is of interest and concern. A rich evidence base of the scope and nature of transitions work undertaken by Scottish childminders is needed.

Research into home-based daycare and the transitions involved

Family-based care, insufficiently studied (Stephen & Duncan, 2014), is not as visible as other forms of provision for young children and as a consequence may be undervalued, particularly in the domain of transitions of which young children have many experiences in contemporary society: transitions between environments, relationships, modes of provision and groupings of children. There has been relatively little research into home-based day care (childminding) reported in the English language based literature. At the time of planning this scoping only three recent studies were tightly of relevance: one of which was a Scottish-based study. Evans (2013) found that childminders in England attributed their outstanding practice to training, supportive childminder colleagues, formal and informal childminding networks and Local Council (municipality) development officers who provided some support. Brooker (2014) finding most of the research into childminding in Great Britain happened in the 1980s, investigated the perceptions held by childminders of statutory frameworks in England. In the third study identified, Stephen & Duncan (2014) explored the roles, practices and values of community childminders in Scotland as well as stakeholder perspectives. In collaboration with SCMA, nine community childminders volunteered to participate in Stephen & Duncan's study. To date little other research has been undertaken in Scotland to explore the work done by childminders and to provide an evidence base. In respect of community child minders, they found that not only were community childminders "well prepared to offer high quality experiences" for children in their care, but also:

- The community childminders participating offered a broad range of activities at home and in the community. They paid particular attention to helping the young children with a community childminding place develop their language, communication and social skills and build secure relationships
- The behaviour of community childminders was warm and positive and they were responsive to children's emotions and interests
- Community childminders think about their role as caring for and nurturing children to give their parents essential respite or support. They focus on ensuring the children's comfort and emotional security and understand that child-centred provision fosters development
- Parents and those who manage and commission community childminding services valued the speedy referral systems in operation, the respite a placement offered parents and the opportunities it extended to children. All these stakeholders saw the personal characteristics of community childminders as a vital feature of this service which can make a difference to family life.
- SCMA's leadership and administration of community childminding services was praised. Local authority representatives were keen for SCMA to continue to play a central role in developing community childminding provision.

Stephen & Duncan, 2014, pages 1-4.

More recently, Ang, Brooker, and Stephen (2016) have published a very useful summary review of the literature on home-based day-care which has been helpful in the preparation of this chapter. Their conceptual analysis of "home-based child-care" is based on a review of published, peer reviewed literature from 1990-2013. They argue that "home-based childcare not only offers a specialist type of service as family support, especially for vulnerable families, but that it provides a form of pedagogical approach to children's developmental and educational outcomes that is distinct from any other types of early years care." (Ang, Brooker & Stephen, 2016, page 1). Their review focuses on the issues and debates in research on home-based day-care, the effectiveness of home-based childcare and on children's experiences: all in the context of home-based day-care being a popular form of provision (OECD, 2006, 2012). Ang et al use three themes to illustrate the distinctive nature of childminding that has emerged through their review:

- Home-based childcare offers family support, especially for vulnerable families
- The potential for home-based childcare to offer children personalised, rich and varied learning
- Continuity of care between home-school-family-community

(Ang, Brooker & Stephen, 2016, page 3-4).

Ang et al's themes resonate with the research presented in this chapter. Childminding is different from other forms of childcare by virtue of where it takes place, its flexibility and responsiveness and the attitudes and values expressed by the scoping study participants.

Transitions, continuity and discontinuity

In the field of education in early childhood there is a notable increase in awareness of transitions. Earlier studies emphasised the discontinuities for children in daycare (Moss & Brannan, 1987): this matches the transitions literature of that time that found that developing continuity of experience was a challenge (Cleave, 1982; Cleave, Jowett & Bates, 1982) and that there were significant discontinuities for children as they entered early childhood settings and later went on to school with children and parents together being left to bridge the transition (Clark, 1989) in the absence of other supports. By contrast a study by Coplan et al. (2010) in Canada that found differences in anxiety during the transition to primary school between children who attended home-based day-care and children who attended centre-based care, with children at higher risk for anxiety who attended home-based care being much less anxious two years later in primary school than the equivalent children who had attended centre-based care.

Rusby, Jones, Crowley and Smolkowski (2013), make a link between home-based caregivers' attitudes and their interactions with children which were positively associated with child social behavior. Rusby et al refer to a core indicator of school readiness as social-emotional competence. While there is much evidence of the importance of social-emotional competence across the early childhood literature it seems counter-intuitive to use this in the context of early learning and childcare where socio-cultural approaches have found the concept of school readiness as the purpose of early learning and childcare to be toxic (Dunlop, 2016). Both continuities and discontinuities are factors in the move to school and any service – in early learning and childcare, and in school, must be ready for children.

Given the commuting between systems that children attending home-based day-care do, it is important to reflect on how to best create a framework in which to understand the childminder's approach to transitions as a process and how this may influence the child's and family's experiences.

Conceptual Framework

One of the dominant models used to explain children's transitions is Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The conceptual framework used here takes account of the author's use of the work of Bourdieu's (1991) concept of social capital, integrated with Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach to generate thinking about transitions networks³, transitions ease⁴ transitions capital⁵ and therefore transitions readiness (rather than school readiness)⁶ (Dunlop, 2015). The

³ Transitions networks: social networks focused on transitions and including children, families and practitioners as they work together to foster well-being during transitions from one setting to another or across settings during a given day or week.

⁴ Transitions ease: building positive experiences of navigating transitions

⁵ Transitions capital: a form of bridging social capital providing tools for the child to draw upon

⁶ Transitions readiness: equipping children in a supportive way to be able to handle change.

importance of networks and connectedness to ease transitions, to build social capital in relation to transitions. and therefore to create a form of readiness for transition (which for children will allow them to cope better with change), is also significant for the adults including both parents and professionals as it acknowledges that transitions may generate a 'space-between': what Bronfenbrenner would call a meso-system, in which new interactions occur and the dialogue spoken, or unspoken but enacted, may reveal the feelings and experiences of the protagonists in the transitions space (White & Redder, 2015).

Shpancer (2002) wrote of the ecology of the home-daycare link, Rusby et al refer to an ecological, nested set /system of relationships (Rusby et al, 2013): working with an ecological mindset, informed by a bio-ecological approach it is useful to reflect on the systems around a child and family and how these can embrace and connect with the child's own home experiences in positive ways to foster what Shpancer calls "the role of the child's characteristics in cross-contextual adaptation" and "intercontextual continuity" (page 374). The dual home-daycare contexts children populate may be mutually influencing and makes the parent-caregiver relationship a powerful actor in the success of the experience for child, parent and day-carer, and for the wellbeing of all.

Beyond their own role in family support, the potential of the childminders to use their networks to widen the networks of advice and support available to the families they work with is also underexplored. For children referred to a community-childminding service this expansion of experience stands to have a positive impact on their wellbeing and capacity to cope with change. Social and emotional well-being within the day-care experience is a foundation for taking advantage of new experiences. Freeman and Karlsson (pp.83-86, 2012) propose four principles to inform family day care pedagogy, these are 'encouraging active engagement', 'privileging children's play', 'challenging and provoking' and 'taking advantage of the natural environment'. Together these principles inform a family day care pedagogy that foster children's learning in positive ways and set children up as confident learners: important as they make transitions.

Framing transitions as opportunities, thinking about those spaces in between that children navigate, raises the role of childminders in transitions as a significant part of their work. For Ang, Brooker and Stephen (2016, page 4) "home-based child-care appears to play a pivotal role in supporting children's transitions and connections from preschool to primary school or from home to preschool and school environments". Equally, Bowes et al (2009), focusing on the transition between prior-to-school settings and school in Australia, found that home-based childcare provided useful support for children at times of transition but this was stronger for parental than non-parental care: the study focused on three variables based on parent report: the number of transition to school activities that the child attended; parents' support for literacy – reading to the child at home and shared family activities.

More needs to be known about the day-to-day experiences offered in home-based early learning and childcare settings: transitions provide a tool for understanding this and an ecological frame ensures involvement of all perspectives, including children.

The Scoping Study

The scoping consultation in preparation for a Scotland wide study of childminders' contribution to child & family transitions, was undertaken in four different communities, representing the variety of possible communities in Scotland. They were an island community in the North of Scotland, a country town in the North-East, a city in the West of Scotland and a village in the Central belt. Seventeen childminders volunteered to take part in this first phase of the scoping study. As the volunteers were a convenience sample, the number varied in the groups across the four sites, with 2 supporting development officers who were not currently childminding themselves.

Focus Group Methodology

Focus Groups normally aim to bring people together to discuss a topic of shared interest. They typically generate three levels of data or units of analysis: the individual, the group and the interaction (Cyr, 2015). It is important to consider the focus group design in relation to the type of evidence sought (Ryan, Gandha, Culbertson & Carlson, 2014). In seeking a process that would foster participation and depth of thinking it was decided to use Nominal Group Technique (NGT), which is a highly structured approach affording the maximum input from each participant and a minimum influence from the researcher.

NGT aims to draw on a range of views and to establish strength of view on that range, thus achieving a consensus, when consensus is understood as 'informed agreement'. Both the drawbacks and the added value of NGT are recognised (Kennedy & Clinton, 2009). The group starts with time for independent generation of ideas in response to a stimulus question. In the case of this study the stimulus question was "What do Childminders do to support children's transitions?" Participants then share their thinking by making individual contributions round the group: these are recorded for all to see. The whole group then cooperates to organise, categorise and prioritise responses. This approach, while following a strict protocol (Tague, 2004), allows individual participants to generate their own ideas in response to the question posed, to present and list statements of their ideas in turn round the group without any discussion, save for clarification and grouping of similar ideas interactively together and then to vote individually (again according to a set protocol of how to vote) to prioritise ideas.

In each case the master statements drawn out from each of the four groups are presented here, including the total votes each statement received. It should be noted that the master statements are mutually agreed in each group as important, but the

voting process, which limits the number of points each participant can allocate, results in some constructs receiving no votes. Overall this system results in a clear summary of how any given group prioritises the ideas they themselves generated.

The grids are presented in the results section below with the constructs receiving a higher number of votes being elaborated with statements from participants' clarifying statements and teasing out of shared understandings.

Results

Group 1: An Island Community

This small group included a childminder with twenty-three years of experience, a newly registered childminder and one who had been childminding for five years. The idea of thinking about transitions seemed novel to two of the group so we held an opening discussion: this led to agreement that a useful way to think about how they supported transitions was for each to go through their day in the 10 minute individual note taking session. One respondent said she wouldn't have much to write, but after ten minutes had made detailed notes, slightly to her own surprise.

The group generated fourteen Master Statements, shown in Table 1, giving their highest score to a '*continuity role*', their next to '*providing strategies*' and then ranking '*preparation is all*' and '*transitions for childminders before and after*' equally.

Table 1- Group 1

Master Statements Group 1 (n=3)	Score
1. Marking/ reassuring about parent's return	0
2. Existing children's well-being	3
3. Preparation is all	6
4. Boundaries with parents	0
5. Providing strategies	11
6. Reassuring role	0
7. Importance of feedback from parents	0
8. Presence in the community	0
9. Transitions into preschool	0
10. Continuity role	15
11. Building familiarity	3
12. Transitions for childminder before and after	6
13. Supporting the supporters	0
14. Own family transition	1

Clarification of Group 1's more highly rated statements follow:

'Continuity role'

One of the participants mentioned what she called "a new dynamic" – the parents of a childminding child become foster parents to two boys who had been to this same childminder already – there was a sense of the children being moved back and

forward - the childminder felt her role to be “supporting the supports”. All needed to know what they should do if the natural parents were to turn up at the school door – this childminder was very aware of the need to provide some continuity for the children. She was party to both the family and the foster family situation. She felt in a privileged position where she might notice things others don’t. Another childminder was introducing 2 new babies slowly – talking with existing children about babies who are coming as a preparation. She observed that a new baby will change the routine for all (2: *existing children*).

‘Providing strategies’

A child attending the childminder was also in preschool where they found he had temper control problems (there was a sense that staff and other parents were commenting and there was a risk of scapegoating). His childminder thought about appropriate strategies and a mean of self-reminder: the child was to remember the counting done together with the childminder in his time at her home when he became frustrated and so his new trigger to cope was “Ben Ten” “Ben Ten” (normally counting to ten!) – the childminder explained at preschool. This gave the child space, he was not picked on following this: it was understood as a behavioural transition allowing self-regulation.

‘Preparation is all’

A new child and mum had 2 or 3 visits together before the mother left the child for the first time for 2 or 3 hours (this was seen to be so helpful that the visits happened before the start date and was unpaid – no charges). The same childminder has a settling-in questionnaire – “some bairns take longer” so either first month or second month to ask parents how they feel the child has settled, plus how they feel about the service provided. Parent and childminder talk morning & night regularly.

‘Transitions for childminders before and after’

There was acknowledgement within the group that when the children in their charge start school the transition is also hard for the childminder (“even horrible”). “Children have been with you since babies-even though the nursery is next to the first school class, you take them to the school bus, you get back home in time to go with car-children seeing what the others do - one 7 year old found it hard, others got benefit”.

Group 2: A Country Town

The four childminders who took part in Focus Group 2 all included children and young people from Forces families in their service. Several of the childminders had the older siblings coming for after-school care, overall they felt that this was an important aspect of continuity they could offer to a whole family and it was particularly important if one of the parents was away on active service. Two expressed that their personal experience of loss and bereavement made them emotionally available to their charges in positive ways.

Generating twelve Master Statements, this group placed a high emphasis on *‘Providing reassurance, safety and trust’*. The group felt this was an embracing principle and to achieve this also meant focusing on *‘Relationships’* and *‘Parent support, parent advice, helping parent to take a step back’* which were also important statements in their own right and that each construct implied *‘Ability to use knowledge and skills in different ways’*.

Table2 – Group 2

Master Statements Group 2 (n=4)	Score
1. Providing reassurance, safety and trust	20
2. Links with the community	2
3. Starting in a new setting	4
4. Relationships	8
5. Coping with changes in the setting	0
6. Ability to use knowledge and skills in different ways (flexibility)	6
7. Building relationships, showing commitment and effect of this on families	4
8. Forces families: advice and support	3
9. Rules set up with children	0
10. Policy in Place	1
11. Feedback to parents	4
12. Parent support, parent advice, helping parent to take a step back	8

Clarification of Group 2’s more highly rated statements follow:

‘Providing reassurance, safety and trust’

The whole group understood it to be critical for children who often face a change, a new start or someone close leaving. It was observed that the attachment between children and with childminder of necessity developed quickly. This meant that children who found themselves in tricky situations could turn to the childminder, feel safe and would often rely on childminder to talk with, to share troubles and to relieve their own parent from worry.

‘Relationships’

The relationships between the childminder and children whose lives faced many interruptions, drew in wider family involvement from the childminder’s own family- the loss of her own child in family was felt sharply by one childminder who nevertheless found this helped her to relate to what the children were going through with a parent away on active service. Sometimes this meant that the childminder or her own children used to babysit, felt a strong commitment to families and this commitment supported the building relationships, sometimes in the longer term – the effect on families was positive and years on childminders had been asked to a former charge’s wedding or other family events. This also, though not looked for, clearly gave the minded children a different kind of continuity.

‘Parent support, parent advice, helping parent to take a step back’

Often one parent could be away, being posted to a different country for a period of

time. Sometimes the families left together, often without much notice: children were then attending different schools, making new friendships, dealing with a house move and the consequent disruptions. Frequent changes made it hard for children to settle in and give trust: talking, recognising and acknowledging past and forthcoming changes and preparing for leaving friends and school were important elements of these childminders' practice.

'Ability to use knowledge and skills in different ways'

To support children was deemed as important. The child minder is an important resource for the child when their family situation is changing. The childminder's priority is to focus on children- to be constant and steady, for example when parents have separated, it is reassuring for parent and children if the childminder can be the thing that never changes. Knowledgeable, use skills in a different way – flexible - two children have L.D. (epilepsy, may be autistic, absence seizures) – it's a handful but stuck with it – again consistency becomes important, as do boundaries and limits.

'Links with the community'

The childminders' links in the community were seen as important and valued – it was good to have forged relationships with the doctor, the nursery and the school. One childminder was a co-opted member of the Parent-Teacher Council and talked about the benefits for the children and families she supported. She had more contact with the school than many of the families whose children she cared for.

Group 3: A village

This group consisted of six participants, one of whom was the local SCMA childminding development officer who had previously worked as a childminder for many years. The group was a mix of childminders: some of whom were community childminders supporting children placed by the Local Authority.

The group generated ten Master Statements, giving a high priority to 'communication', 'support' and children's individual 'needs' and scoring 'stability' as a key element of their transitions practice.

Table 3- Group 3

Master Statements Group 3 (n=5+1)	Score
1. Communication	27
2. Stability	9
3. Needs	14
4. Dispositions	2
5. Boundaries	1
6. Routine	2
7. Continuity	5
8. Contingency	0
9. Consistency	4
10. Support	21

Clarification of Group 3's more highly rated statements follow:

'Communication'

Communication is at the heart of what childminders do – by building relationships, providing information and feedback and building networks we can ensure children are supported in the transitions we make: this applies to families too.

'Support'

Supporting in this way gives the best outcome for children and families: the best outcomes for all is that children are happy, confident, able to mix socially, self-assured (to be themselves), feel able and have their dispositions recognised. The constructs 10, 3, 1 and 4 were tightly linked in the view of this group.

'Needs' This group of childminders agreed with parents how to best prepare their (families and children are different) child for school/nursery and together work on that plan – eg independence, socialising...to set the child up for success, (linking to constructs 1, 10, 2, 3).

'Stability'

Children attending the childminder, whose ages overlap with the childminders' own children, can become part of the family. In such cases the childminders own family need to be reassured of their own space and privacy. For one childminder past children often kept in touch – she mentioned a 24 year old that pops in; a child she had from 8 months who is now 12 years old and his older brother who is 19. She talked about how minded children grow up, and the very long relationship developed with a family when 3 children from one family had all come to the same childminder.

Group 4: A large city

Five participating childminders were supported at this meeting by their local SCMA Development Officer. As a group they held a long experience of childminding. A number of the group were also employed by the Local Authority as Community Childminders.

This group generated 14 Master Statements, with 'continuity of care' being given a high priority. Four other constructs were given a lesser but similar score: 'feeling secure', 'developing trust', 'development, independence and confidence of the child', the 'individuality of children' and 'communication with parents and other services'. Each of the included Master Statements agreed by the group express elements that were important to these childminders and included some important aspects for transition, for example: focus on the settling in period, socialisation, boundaries and house rules, being supportive, flexible and approachable.

Table 4 – Group 4

Master Statements Group 3 (n=5+1)	Score
1. Feeling secure	13
2. Continuity of care	25
3. Socialisation, boundaries and house rules	0
4. Understanding parental anxieties	4
5. Development, independence and confidence of the child	10
6. Being joyful	0
7. Communication with parents and other services	9
8. Communication with the child	0
9. Supportive, flexible, approachable	4
10. Developing trust	11
11. Relationships with older after-school care children	0
12. Confidentiality	0
13. Individuality of children	10
14. Focus on the settling in period	2

Clarification of Group 4's more highly rated statements follow:

'Continuity of care'

This was provided in a number of ways: text messages, working out separation with parents, fostering resilience. Children were observed to cope very differently. An example was given of one child whose parents are separated, who each week spent 2 full days with another childminder, time with two sets of grandparents, time with each parent, 2 days a week with the childminder involved in the study. She became the thin, consistent thread of continuity between all the different people involved with the particular child by working hard to maintain contact with each of the other settings.

'Feeling secure'

Childminders worked hard to have children feel secure by not rushing settling in periods and taking time with each daily hand-over (childminders often reported feeling concern for the children and their parents that they should feel comfortable and confident in the carer). Part of this role was to build trust with the family.

'Developing Trust'

Children and adults like to please childminder – different from pleasing parents whose love is unconditional. No two children are alike: there are different things going on for each. It was observed by childminders that attachment leads the way to working effectively, particularly with younger children.

'Development, independence and confidence'

Means helping children to be independent and supporting development eg, making choices (empowering), putting shoes or jacket on, playing games and helping.

Building their confidence (sensitive to parents)

Means preparing for change – eg new child minder, nursery, moving away, talking, being positive about change, preparing, keeping in touch.

'Individuality of children'

All group members felt it was essential to treat all the children as individuals and not make presumption about them as a group.

'Communication with parents and other services'

Parents often seek advice. It is important to have a written mutual agreement between childminders and parents and to ensure that the childminder and each service involved with the child has a means of communicating effectively.

Discussion

Many of the listed Master Statements reflect the values, attitudes and beliefs of the participant childminders. Susman-Stillman, Pleuss and Englund (2013) examined patterns of caregiving of 98 care providers (56 of whom offered home-based child care). They looked at how these patterns differ between family and center providers over time, and to what extent caregivers' attitudes and beliefs shape those caregiving patterns. Their work shows the importance of understanding the relationship between values, attitudes and beliefs and care-giving practices. These might be deemed to be higher-order constructs and the participants by the end of a session expressed a view that 'everything rests on good communication' or 'continuity is the absolute priority'. Groups expressed that the opportunity to take part in a focus group on transitions had been worthwhile and would inform their future practice. Many gave examples of their practice and said a future study should seek out what people actually do day-to-day. Such study should also address not only how childminders potentially support each other, but also how other known adults, such as the practitioners in nursery school, playgroup and school, may participate in sharing of expertise beyond the group.

The Scottish childminders who took part in this scoping study were clear in the importance they place on continuity through transitions, effective communication, recognizing the individuality of children, the need to build trust and confidence within the relationships they developed with child and family and to claim a place in the community which could support change and transitions for children, families, older siblings, themselves and their own families.

All had a strong desire to support families. They talked about the challenges, and the privilege of meetings in homes which were all homely but organised. Qualities of a good home learning environment – the affordances, were deemed to be quite different from institutional care. Opportunities and experience are more personalised, there are opportunities for greater attachment, emotional availability and commitment to whole family. As childminders step up to the Scottish Workforce challenge, as they become 1140 hour providers, will this change the nature of what they do? Findings from the forthcoming study informed by this scoping, should be compared with other studies.

Childminding, home based care, children, families, transitions

Rusby et al (2013) also posits that the mentorship skilled home-based caregivers could provide for novice home-based carers could improve the quality of the service offered. The nature of relationships between parents and childminders gives scope for providing something quite new and different. Fauth, Owen and Jelcic (2012) write of the additional value of home-based settings which may be able to serve as a form of family support beyond the actual childcare provision – this links well with the present findings on values and attitudes and the explicit mention childminders make of networks, community and parental support.

In Scotland we are starting to refer to as ‘blended models’ where children attend more than one out-of-home setting. Gordon, Colaner, Usdansky and Melgar (2013) in addressing the frequency of multiple arrangements for children in early childhood, found that “Preschoolers score higher on reading and math assessments, on average, when they attend centers, alone or in combination with home-based child care, than when they are cared for only in homes, either by their parents or by others.” (page 993). They quote figures from Laughlin (2010) that about one in six children under the age of 5 attend more than one contiguous childcare setting, whereas Porter, Paulsell, Del Grosso, Aveliar, Hass and Vuong (2010) found this to be nearer one in five: little is known about why, but in Scotland where children are offered 600 hours of free early learning and childcare in any given year (3-5 year olds) the multiple arrangements may be explained by the need for working parents to have additional hours of childcare beyond the average of 16 per week, due to rise significantly in coming years.

Childminders in this small scoping study reported such arrangements and were often responsible for getting children to nursery and fetching them and later to school induction and school itself: this raised issues about children’s regular day-to-day transitions, about continuity and for some about how nursery staff related to them. Increasingly home-based childcare and attendance at a nursery setting are no longer an ‘either or’ but rather a ‘both’. Gordon et al also report benefits to combining care types in terms of reading and maths outcomes but conclude more research is needed to know the influence on other aspects of child development. For parents making choices it will be important to understand the link between such choices and their work-family balance in relation to their employment.

This dual role of the childminder offering home-based care in supporting both children and their families has not been much researched nor well understood: especially in relation to low-income families (Bromer and Henly, 2009). The respondents in the present study included a number of individuals working as Community Childminders: home-based carers employed by the Local Council (Municipality) to provide services for eligible two-year olds for a specified period and to provide both for the positive experiences for the child and also to give consistent family support. In terms of transitions, some community childminders reported issues

around the lack of flexibility in Community Childminding Service Provision. This was compounded by: little access to additional funds to allow child to remain in childminders care (eg transport issues) beyond the initially contracted period; lack of continuity for the child if there is a mismatch of timing between services, and lack of consideration of gap between a placement with a Community Childminder which ends prior to the child turning two (and then able to access 600 hours funding).

Given children in these placements are deemed 'vulnerable' as well as being from families where there is economic eligibility, such inconsistencies need to be resolved so that experiences, relationships and care can be consistent and provide continuity – a principle valued by the childminders who participated in this study.

Conclusion: Research to be developed

The aim of the scoping study groups was to draw out the contributions of childminders to child and family transitions with a view to creating a Scotland wide study, at a time when there are huge changes in the offer for children and families and debates about institutional versus the alternative of family based day care.

The consultation process reported here illustrates a journey towards a Scotland-wide study. This will mean developing an online survey: in turn this survey will ask for interest in case study workshops where a template will be used to support some continuity of information given across case studies. Together these approaches will inform knowledge about -

- What is unique about childminding that supports children in transition;
- What is unique about childminding that supports parents in navigating their own transitions and the transitions their children are experiencing;
- How childminders provide continuity as children and families navigate change;
- The ways in which the knowledge of individual children held by the childminder support children's transitions;
- What informs childminder knowledge of transitions;
- How the values, attitudes and beliefs about transitions impact on childminders' day-to-day practice, and
- The ways in which childminders could share their approaches to transitions with other childminding practitioners and beyond.

There is an interesting quiet self confidence in many childminders. It is difficult to say whether this is because of a certain autonomy and need to be so because of working for themselves, OR that they are working for themselves because of that kind of capacity. This is complex work, done well it is a true home from home for families with the added value of the experienced other in their children's lives. The ambition is to recognise the importance of the values, attitudes and beliefs of childminders and

how they link to developing daily practices to support children's transitions through an understanding that such a focus can be a tool for change.

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